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# **The Croatian Armed Forces Training Simulations Program**

**By**

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In February 2001, the Croatian Armed Forces officially opened the Croatian Armed Forces Leader and Staff Simulation Center (CLSSC). Hailed by some as one of the best equipped training simulation centers in the region, the CLSSC marks a dramatic new step in transforming the Croatian Armed Forces from its wartime disposition to one aimed at improving interoperability with Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Through a comprehensive simulations training program, the Croatian Armed Forces are preparing their forces for the future.

## **A Deposit Paid in Blood**

The Croatian Ministry of Defense (MoD) began the conceptualization for a training simulations program three years after the end of Croatia's war for independence from the Republic of Yugoslavia. Early in 1999, the MoD recognized the need to transform its armed forces into a more modern, better-equipped force in line with western compatible doctrine, training and command and control. The conundrum faced by the senior leaders of the Croatian MoD was how to accomplish this goal with limited resources. The answer to part of that problem lay with training simulations. The use of simulations was recognized as a primary means of training staffs and junior leaders in western decision making and staff procedures. As a result, the government of Croatia, through the MoD, set in motion plans to develop a training simulations program and to establish a Croatian Armed Forces Leader and Staff Simulation Center. This vision included integrating simulations training into all facets of the professional training curriculum of the Croatian Armed Forces.

In an armed forces competing for scarce resources, why invest in expensive training simulations? First and foremost was the need for the Croatian Armed Forces to train its leaders to western standards. In May of 2000 Croatia joined the PfP program and articulated as one of its strategic goals, full membership in NATO. To achieve this goal, the need for interoperability was paramount. Secondly, with a hodge-podge of doctrines left over from the former Yugoslavian Army, the Croatian Armed Forces had a bewildering array of tactics, techniques, and doctrinal procedures with little basis for standardization. Training simulations would allow leaders and staff the first real opportunity to acquaint themselves with western doctrine techniques and tactics. The third major factor in choosing to invest in training simulations stemmed from resources. For the Croatian MoD, time, money and training facilities are in short supply. Even though the initial costs for training simulations programs would be expensive, the training costs would be easily recuperated over the long run.

Besides the obvious values of training simulations, a less tangible reason existed for the use of simulations. For many in the Croatian Armed Forces, the value of providing better training for its soldiers was based on bitter lessons learned from wartime experiences. In the early days of Croatia's war for independence, many hastily assembled units were no more than groups of friends from a town organized into makeshift infantry units. These units in turn made up the brigades that fought the major actions of the war. These men, many of whom had no formal military training, learned their trade by trial and error, sometimes with grave consequences. After the war, commanders of the Croatian Armed Forces committed themselves to the belief that

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training saves lives. For the Croatian Armed Forces, training simulations would help ensure future generations of Croatian soldiers did not suffer because of inadequate training.

Recognizing that training simulations were a cost-effective means of training the armed forces, the creation of a simulation center became the target goal. The next step was to develop an implementation plan. A timed phased approach was taken to implementing this plan and it was developed with the assistance of retired army officers and non-commissioned officers working for the U.S. defense contractor, Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI).

### **The Simulation Center Takes Shape**

The initial technical proposal for the simulation center began in May 1999 with the development of an implementation plan for the creation of the CLSSC. This was followed by letters of request (LOR) to purchase both JANUS and SPECTRUM simulation software. In December 1999, the MoD established its simulation project team and selected a site for the center on the compound of the Croatian Military Academy Petar Zrinski in Zagreb. Playing a vital role in the development of this simulations training initiative, MPRI began providing advice and assistance for the plan from its inception. By April of 2000 MPRI had a full time project team committed to the simulations training program. The MPRI had been active in Croatia since 1995 and at the time was also providing support to the ministry of defense and general support through two programs, the Croatian Army Readiness Training (CARTS) program and the Long Range Management Program (LRMP). The relationship between MPRI and the Croatian government has been a long-standing one. The zenith of their assistance, some thirty plus personnel worked in both programs. With the assistance of MPRI, the training simulations initiative took off. The MPRI played an instrumental role in the planning, design, fielding and implementation of the CLSSC and today provides a small staff that continues to assist the center with the training, planning, and evaluating of units during rotations. More than just technical support, the MPRI team provides feedback in the form of after action reviews and take-home packages for units similar to those provided at U.S. training centers like the National Training Center (NTC).

The ODC also played a key role in the program and became an active player in the very early stages. The ODC involvement began when the Croatian Ministry of Defense asked for the purchase of the JANUS and SPECTRUM software programs using foreign military sales (FMS). The JANUS software is designed for more conventional military operations and was intended for training the mainstay forces of the Croatian armed forces. SPECTRUM software is a program that can replicate various operations other than war (OOTW) scenarios and was intended as a tool primarily to train forces in preparation for future roles and missions, namely peace support operations.

By late summer of 2000, the final hurdles in establishing the infrastructure for the CLSSC were surmounted. From August of the same year until late fall, work focused on upgrades to the building and acquiring the equipment, computers, and other items needed to establish a fully functioning center. Phase one was complete.

The next phase involved the actual fielding of the training simulations software. This phase was not without some setbacks. The fielding of both JANUS and SPECTRUM was delayed because a pre-existing, bi-lateral, terrain data agreement between the government of Croatia and the National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA) did not exist. Without this agreement, NIMA could not release the terrain data needed to create the terrain files for the software. After weeks of coordination, the geo-spatial agreement was finally signed, the JANUS and SPECTRUM terrain files were delivered and the JANUS new equipment training team arrived in the late fall to train the CLSSC staff on use of the software.

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With SPECTRUM, the fielding of the software was even more complicated. From the beginning of the training simulations plan it was always clear that JANUS was the premier tool for training in the conventional roles that the new Croatian Armed Forces would execute. JANUS was to be fielded exclusively in the CLSSC. With SPECTRUM, the actual intended users of that software were less defined. Different organizations within the MoD felt they had legitimate claims to receive the software and training. With competing interests potentially detracting from the overall benefit, a cooperative solution between the MoD, MPRI, ODC and the team leader conducting the new equipment training was devised. The new equipment training team was able to cut costs and provide the MoD with fifteen laptop computers, configured into three computer suites with the SPECTRUM software loaded on each. Three suites then went to three different training organizations, the Strategic Studies Institute, the CLSSC and the newly developed International Military Operations Center (IMOC). This innovative solution effectively tripled the training value of the software provided.

Finally, with much fanfare, the CLSSC was officially opened. A pilot test was conducted and the first unit rotation began in March 2001. The CLSSC had become the first tangible project in the overall simulations training initiative.

### **The Croatian Armed Forces Leader and Staff Simulation Center (CLSSC)**

The CLSSC Staff is organized into several components, some of which have direct advisory support from MPRI. The commander has an administrative staff that is linked to the exercise director. Under the commander, three main components exist: an exercise branch, responsible for scenario development; a tactical operations branch, which consists of specialists in each of the battlefield operations systems and is responsible for the application of doctrinal principles; and a technical branch responsible for data base management and systems upkeep. The center itself is configured into several component parts. (see Figure 1).

Much has been accomplished by the CLSSC in the year and a half that it has been operational. The CLSSC successfully trained seventeen battalion task force staffs. Each was an opportunity to train the commander and his staff on the latest US/NATO doctrinal principles, to train on the integration of battle operating systems, incorporate NBC, close air support, and other assets. Through one rotation, a unit exercises the full extent of its capabilities, something that could rarely, if ever be incorporated in an actual field training exercise. In addition to its battalion task force rotations, four brigade task force rotations are also planned for next year.

### **The Way Ahead: New initiatives**

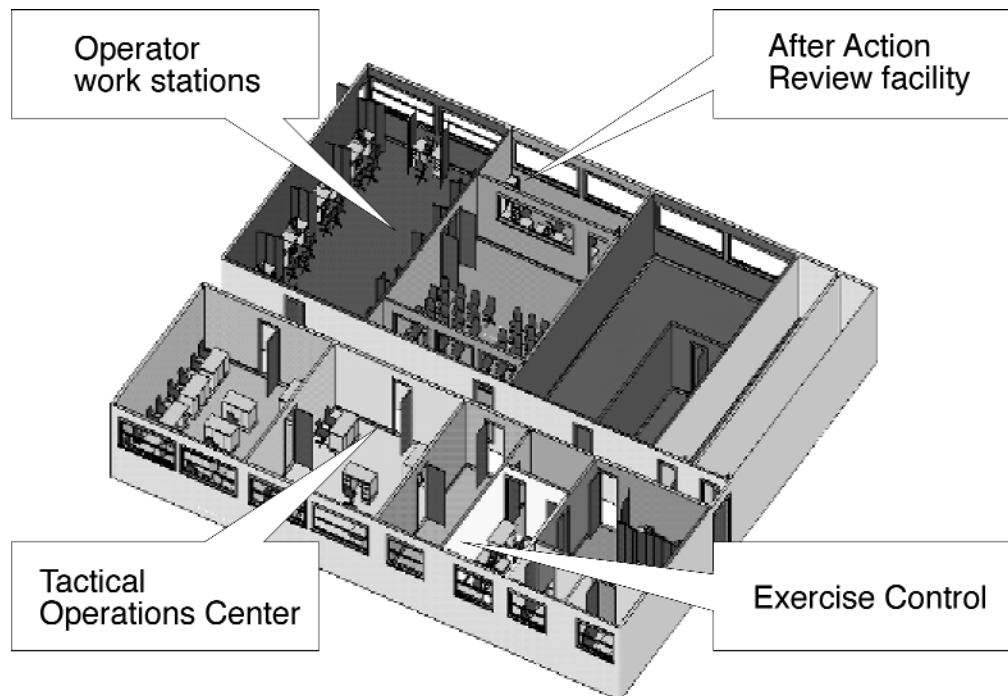
In keeping with its training simulations plan, the MoD is working to develop a combat training center in Slunj, Croatia. This facility will be modeled after U.S. combat training centers and will give units the ability to train in the field against dedicated opposing forces. Croatia has established an FMS case to purchase Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System simulation equipment for use in the combat training centers. Plans are also being developed to link the CLSSC with the combat training centers providing a greater capability to exercise both staffs and units in the field.

As stated, the International Military Operations Center (IMOC) has one suite of SPECTRUM and is planning to use it to develop various training scenarios to better prepare forces designated for participation in peace support operations. The International Military Operations Center is responsible for training and development of programs to prepare Croatian forces for participation in international military operations. Accordingly, the International Military Operations Center has prepared the Croatian contingents for their military observer missions in Ethiopia-Eritrea (UNMEE) and two medical support teams to UNMEE. They also trained the military observer

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teams that are deployed to Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). Use of the CLSSC and its own suite of SPECTRUM will give the International Military Operations Center the capability to assist in preparing forces for even more complex missions. Future planned activities include training additional units for participation in NATO, Partnership for Peace exercises and peace support operations including a light infantry, engineer and medical evacuation units.

**Figure 1. Configuration of CLSSC**



At the Croatian Ministry of Defense Strategic Studies Institute, SPECTRUM software is being utilized in various model and simulation programs but also to develop strategic decision making scenarios for senior government and military officials. Croatia is scheduled to participate in the South Eastern Europe Simulation Network exercise taking place next December. The CLSSC will serve as the national simulation support cell to that exercise. The focus of the South Eastern Europe Simulation Network exercise will be on civil emergency, peace support operations and out of area assistance type operations. In addition to those stated training simulation initiatives, both the Croatian Navy and Croatian Air Force are also working on developing their own training simulation requirements.

## **Conclusion**

The Croatian Armed Forces simulation program was envisioned to assist primarily in training commanders and staffs at battalion and brigade level and to support institutional, general staff and Ministry of Defense training and planning requirements. However, simulations training and the simulations center play a broader role in assisting the Croatian Armed Forces in transitioning to a modern force in tune with the latest western operational techniques and doctrine. The training goals and objectives of the simulations training program ensure the synchronization and integration of all battlefield operations systems, assist the planning of combat support and combat service support operations and support understanding the use of terrain and intelligence. The training simulations program also is helping prepare forces for new roles and missions. In conclusion, the value of training simulations to the Croatian Armed Forces cannot be over

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emphasized. Through effective use of simulations, the Croatian armed forces are better able to train their forces for their primary missions, but also prepare at all levels, strategic, operational, and tactical for the new roles and missions of the Croatian Armed Forces in the 21st century.

**Figure 2. Battalion Task Force Staff inside the Tactical Operations Center at the CLSSC**



**Figure 3: Operator work stations at the CLSSC**



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## About the Author

Major Richard Liebl is the Chief for the Office of Defense Cooperation in Zagreb, Croatia. In 1999, he served as the Commander for Special Operations Command and Control Element-North (SOCCE-N) as part of Operation Joint Forge. Liebl is a graduate of Columbus State University and has earned a Master of Arts degree in West European Studies from Indiana University. He was commissioned as an Infantry Officer and served in the 25th Infantry Division (Light). In 1991 he graduated from Special Forces Detachment Officer Qualification Course and served in the 3d Special Forces Group (Airborne). Major Liebl has conducted Foreign Area Officer training, and attended DLI for Dutch/Flemish and In-Country Training in the Netherlands.

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